



Original Article

Towards a History of Prophylaxis and Dietetics against Cancer, Some Examples from Renaissance to Enlightenment

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Abstract

Establishing a parallel between cancer and elephantiasis, Galen posits a link between the latter and the diet and the heat of the country. In Alexandria, many people are suffering from that disease because they eat a lot of porridge made of groats, lentils, snails and salted fish. But it is the contrary in Germany and elephantiasis almost never appears among the Scythians who drink a lot of milk. Galen's reader may think that diet determines in the same way the occurrence of cancer as it generates a thick and melancholic humour.

Keywords: Elephantiasis; Milk; Hippocrates; Diet; Laxatives

Introduction

In *Air, Waters and Places*, Hippocrates defined health "on the basis of an equilibrium achieved between environmental forces on the one hand (wind, temperature, water, ground and food) and individual habits on the other (diet, alcohol, sexual behaviour but also work and leisure" [1]. Thus, the "pathogenic process is a result of the overturn of equilibrium and the predominance of one of the four fluids that causes disease", mostly by 'plethora', or accumulation of humours – such an accumulation producing for example the aggregation of milk that generates breast cancer, according to Hippocratic tradition. In oncogenesis, the *diatetica* included of course the way people eat and drink, but also a psychological factor, that is to say a "similar prudence in the control of emotions" [2]. "All excess was life-threatening", and for Hippocrates, "a continual serenity, which springs from a good conscience, is, of all the affections of the mind, the greatest contributor to perfect health" (quoted by Kaaartinen).

Galen also developed similar ideas in his treatise *Therapeutics, to Glaucon*. He devoted chapter XII of the second book to the causes and treatment of cancer and elephantiasis [3]. Concerning the treatment, he states that he has often cured this disease at its birth, especially when the melancholic tumour seems to be not too thick. The latter, indeed, quickly yields

to laxatives and the healing follows. It is obvious that the administered drugs must be appropriate for the evacuation of the black humours and that a diet is prescribed which produces a useful humo.

Establishing a parallel between cancer and elephantiasis, Galen posits a link between the latter and the diet and the heat of the country. In Alexandria, many people are suffering from that disease because they eat a lot of porridge made of groats, lentils, snails and salted fish. But it is the contrary in Germany and elephantiasis almost never appears among the Scythians who drink a lot of milk. Galen's reader may think that diet determines in the same way the occurrence of cancer as it generates a thick and melancholic humour. That is why in carcinomas, there is nothing contrary to the rules in bleeding somebody, if nothing prevents it. These considerations open a tradition of dietetic advice that sometimes conflicted with prophylactic recommendations directed against cancer. We submit below two examples of such proposals dating from rather different periods of the history of medicine and different countries, as specimens of a type of prescription that would deserve further research. We add a chapter concerning palliative prescriptions that include dietetic aspects similar to those found in those two examples.

Materials

Our materials of research comprise three categories of documents extending in Europe from 1500 to 1800 that is to say during the Early Modern Times.

First, we have collected and identified Project what could be called the "François Planque". This French author (1696-1765) had planned to provide a full medical bibliography by subjects classified in alphabetical order, but the considerable scale of the project extinguished the initial project, that was reduced into a *Bibliothèque choisie* published in Paris from 1748 to 1770. However, he anyway edited the first pages of the given up *Bibliographia medica*, which fortunately includes an article Cancer absolutely different from the one given by the *Bibliothèque choisie* [4]. He have classified the observations gathered by Planque according to general areas and countries. We indicate the approximate number of Observations and Advices (**Table 1, Figure 1**).

Table 1: Planque according to general areas and countries.

1	Central Europa, Germany	109
2	Italy	42
3	France	33
4	Low Countries, Holland	30
5	Switzerland	18
6	Denmark, Sweden	8
7	Great-Britain	4

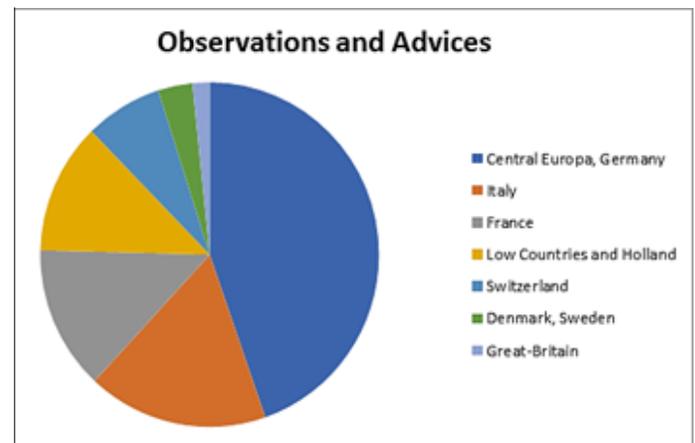


Figure 1 : Planque (historical) according to general countries.

Each country includes important and historical figures of medicine that do not necessarily represent the general proportions of the number of recorded observations. Scandinavia's level could seem low, but all the observations are due to one physician, Thomas Bartholin the Elder (1616-1680), professor in Copenhagen, well-known in the history of gynecology and obstetrics [5]. France and Italy occupy more or less the same rank, but in the field of research concerning breast cancer, for example, the Italian contribution reveals far more important with works by : Amatus Lusitanus (1511-1568), a Jewish Portuguese who worked in Ferrara, Ancona and Rome ; Orazio Augenio (1527-1603), professore all' università di Rome, Turin and Padua ; Girolamo Mercuriale (1530-1606), also professore in Padua ; Christoforo Guerinone, who practiced in the 16th century in Verona and Padua, etc.

A second category of observations is formed by the anthology given by the Genevan Theophile Bonet or Boneti (1620-1689), one of the precursors of pathological anatomy, in his *Observations et histoires chirurgiques tirées des œuvres latines des plus renommés praticiens de ce temps* (1670). His *Centuriae* provide dozens of observations translated in French. We have collected those concerning breast cancer in those authors : Felix Plater (1536-1614, Cent. 1), Nicolaes Tulp (1593-1674, Cent. 1), Martin Ruland the Elder (1532-1602, Cent. 3), Pieter Van Forest (1521-1597, Cent. 4), etc.

The English mentions in Planque, concerning cancer, are poor. A special research should be conducted on the prophylactic and dietetic literature in Great-Britain, especially on the basis of Kaartinen 2013 and Skuse 2015 [6]. Anyway, we have found suggestive to provide some previews from their chapters on palliative discourse during the Enlightenment.

Method

We have compared the prophylactic and dietetic prescriptions upon a selection of topics privileged by Galen and the general medical literature on breast cancer, defined in Droixhe 2015, Droixhe 2016, Droixhe 2017. [7-10]

First of all, those prescriptions stress the prophylactic importance of psychological factors in oncogenesis. Hippocrate's Treatise, p ; 40.

To limit ourselves to the XVIIIth century, a number of German scholars mention stress and fear as some of the main causes of cancer. For example, Gottlieb Ephraim Berner (1671-1741), who studied in Halle with Friedrich Hoffmann and taught medicine at Duisburg University, tells the story of a woman of twenty-six who, having seen a ghost during the night, was affected by such terror that she subsequently discovered a node as large as a big nut (*avellana*) in her left breast [11]. Hence, we must avoid those troubles and passions which produce the excretion of excessive sweat, urines, etc. To develop a moderate and flourishing physical state, it is best to cultivate love and kindness, joy, hope, confidence in others. The patient and the physician must control the affections so that they protect themselves from the scourge of multiple diseases. The exact opposite

occurs with envy, hate, sadness, aversion, which act on us in a vicious way. Lorenz Heister (1683-1758), a professor at the universities of Altdorf and Helmstadt, wrote that sorrow and sadness predispose people to the danger of cancer to an astonishing extent. Finally, this fact particularly deserves to be observed that some women who are unmarried and nuns, or married but sterile, often suffer from cancer of the breast [12-14].

The prescriptions generally enumerate the anti-cancerous alimentary rules in a fragmentary disorder that defy taxonomy. We have chosen to explicit here some of them which request comments, according to the medical glossary and idiolexicon of what was called cancerous disease [10] and in the field of botany or food (see *pastilia* below).

As it will be noticed, most of the prescriptions are due to male authors. It is not the place for discussing here to which extent their discourse concerning cancer implies a special approach to the disease. The feminist activist and poetess Audre Lorde (1934-1992) has given a strong impulse to the debate. "Discussing her own battle with cancer", she argues that the "vast silence" which affects its expression by women themselves "is used in our society as a tool to separate women from the dominant discourse", "which is a public, medical discourse rather than a private one" [14]. Thus, "the suppression of women's discourse about breast cancer results in a powerlessness for women which is reinforced by the ways in which our culture uses 'cancer' as a metaphor for culturally unacceptable ideas like pollution, communism, and corruption". If the statement may be substantially accepted, it could not lead to the assertion that male practitioners obliterated the details of their public discourse about the disease or blunted it by a sort of politeness, modesty or "appropriative propriety" [15]. The observations sent to the French *Journal de médecine* during the XVIIIth century, anyway, do not show any of those "pudeurs médicales" and some could even be untenable for XXIst ordinary readers [7].

Da Monte's Prescriptions

It is well-known that Latin editions of Galen multiplied during the 16th century due to Froben in Basel (1549)

and the Giuntas in Florence (esp. 1565). 1572 saw the publication of a new edition of the *Consultationes medicae* [*Medical Consultations*], written almost half a century previously by Giovanni Battista da Monte, or Montanus (1489-1551). The latter, born in Verona, studied medicine in Ferrara, and obtained his degrees in 1520 in Padua, where he was made professor in 1539. He created anatomo-clinical practice which was attended by Vesalius. We have chosen him as a first testimony of prophylactic recommendations at the beginning of Early Modern Times. He is also one of the most interesting figures of the Padua medical school.

We consider here his *Medical Consultations* in their editions of 1572 and 1583, which propose the same text of the *consilium CXVI*, entitled in Latin “For the treatment of an ulcerated lip from burning melancholic matter with a prescription for cancer in Italian” [16, 17].

Concerning the conservation of health, it is important, first of all, to moderate « all the inconveniences of the soul and to avoid as far as possible sad and anxious thoughts. Thus, you must try to find peace by cultivating a pleasant and happy spirit in the sweet company of those that you like. It is then recommended to practice in the morning moderate exercises like a walk or some horse riding for one hour. Of course, when bad weather does not allow horse riding, a walk at home could replace it.

For breakfast, we take a beaten egg (*ius pulli*) where are cooked “a dozen of currants and 8 or 10 soft plums with a little sugar”. Some discipline is needed before sleep. One must drink “a light and clear wine”, preferably white. The meats must come from young animals, like chicken, calves which are still suckling or kids, while it is worth abstaining from beef and pork, freshly cut or salted and spiced. The same may be said of birds that live in marshy places, like geese and ducks. People must also avoid all kinds of fish, especially those that live in the swamps. They must be careful with dairy products, notably with cheese, as well as the *pastilibus* and things cooked in frying pans. The *pastilia* or *pastiglia* must be a sort of pizza known in the Middle Ages as the *pastillus* (of chicken, etc.; see Antonini 1770) [18]. Finally, all dishes prepared with sugar and cooked wine are not recommended. People must avoid garlic, onions, all sorts of herbs, all sorts of roots, especially parsnips, turnips, and the small root of parsley: sometimes, well-cooked kohlrabi may

be used in good meat juice. We must refrain from all sorts of herbs, raw and cooked, except for good lettuce, endive and borage. Eat eggs, fresh and cooked. As a dish, you may use wheat, rice, and spelt cooked with a good sauce. Those are the kinds of food on which health depends to a great extent”.

Timaeus von Guldenklee’s prescriptions

Not a well-known physician, Balthazar Timaeus von Guldenklee, born in Wschowa (Germ. Fraustadt), attached to the Elector of Brandenburg, may be considered as one of the typical practitioners who exemplified the large current of German studies on cancer, illustrated here by more than one hundred observations. He is perhaps the author who gave the most detailed prescription to someone affected by the disease but it was also, obviously, useful to prevent other diseases.

Stolberg 2016, 263 gives him as an example of physician for whom « notebooks were truly ‘forgetting machines’, devices that made it unnecessary to burden the memory or indeed indispensable to cope with an otherwise overwhelming mass of information” [19].

Timaeus von Guldenklee commented on his painful realization that after a few years of practice he had already forgotten much of what had proven beneficial to his patients, because, in the beginning, he did not keep a journal. He concluded: To remember everything is divine rather than human (Medical Note-Taking in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, *Forgetting Machines: Knowledge Management Evolution in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Alberto Cevolini, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016).

His *Medical Cases Observed during Thirty Years of Practice*, published in 1667, relates the case of Lieutenant Alexander Lauder’s wife, who suffered from an ulcerated cancer of the left breast. She used topical medications that increased the tumour but reduced the pain, so that she could live with less suffering, while the following treatment was administered.

First, we prescribed a suitable diet consisting of easily cooked food with good juice, that is to say chicken, veal, mutton, pigeon, partridge, francolin, thrush, birds of the mountains, fish living in rocks, eggs that can be swallowed, barley brew, dried grapes, sweet almonds and other

things of the same kind [the *francolin (attagen)* is a domestic fowl mostly living in Africa]. On the contrary, we forbid very greasy food (*cibis crassioribus*), producing melancholic blood, and hardened by smoke or by air, and macerated with sourness and acidity in brine. We will also forbid: above all the flesh of hare, goose, duck, pork, and deer, as well as vegetables, old cheese and similar food.

Von Guldenklee recommends as a usual beverage barley beer, well cooked and purified, with the addition, before fermentation, of some fumitory, lemon balm, hart's tongue fern, borage, etc. This prescription deserves some comment. One of the most famous authors in the field of phytotherapy, Leonhart Fuchs (1501-1566), who taught for more than thirty years in Tübingen, had an article about fumitory (*fumaria officinalis*) in his famous *History of plants* [20]. The French edition reminds us that, according to Galen, the plant cures the obstructions and debilities of the liver; because of its sourness and astringent action. Nicolas Deville (1672 ?-1734) confirms that fumitory is very good for unblocking and strengthening the liver and the stomach, according to Aëtius of Amida (mid-5th century to mid-6th century), one of the ancient authors who clearly exposed the features of cancers, their hardness, their irregular shape, 'their deep roots, the varicose state of the veins, the consistency of the tissues (...) and the congestion of the surrounding glands' [21,13]. The same types of effects were attributed later by Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Chomel (1671-1740) [22] to fumitory as an excellent remedy to unblock the obstructions of the viscera and to make the bile flow the accumulation of black bile being the first cause of cancer. Indeed, the plant eases and considerably softens the melancholic vapours (Chomel 1712) [22].

Borage (*buglossum, bovis lingua*) would also be recommended for diseases of the liver by Siméon Seth, a Byzantine physician of the XIth century, and author of a treatise *On the Virtues of Foods* [20]. As the agglutination of bad blood is also responsible for cancer, the plant, according to Chomel, seems very proper to restore the free circulation of blood, when it stagnates in the parts [22]. The hart's tongue fern (*lingua cervina, scolopendria*) is also recommended by the same author for diseases of the liver and the spleen [22]. But Galen and Pliny, according to Fuchs, concentrated on the effects of the hart's tongue fern on the thickening

and obstruction of the spleen [20]. The possible relationships between lemon balm (*melissa officinalis*) and cancer are vague and varied. Fuchs wrote that Dioscorides used it to provoke the menses, whose interruption or deletion was often considered as correlative to cancer [20]. Siméon Seth more precisely attributed to *melissa* a positive action against another cause of cancer: against the sadness, fear and fright occurring from melancholia, and against the phlegmatic and melancholic humour (on the medical dangers of fright: Bartholin 1657, Cent. III, Hist. 41. *Terrore inductus morbus*, 57-58) [23]. So, lemon balm brings joy - by which way we get back to the psychological causes of the disease. The plant is also used to produce sweat, and, as such, is sometimes associated with the blessed thistle (*carduus benedictus*), often mentioned in the cure of scurvy and cancer; and it was also administrated with an infusion of woodlice, a well-known popular remedy against cancer [13].

Be that as it may, the plants mixed here by von Guldenklee are never clearly designated as remedies against cancer, while some of the authors dealing with phytotherapy did have ideas on the subject. For example, Deville, in 1689, considers that the *epithymum* or *cuscuta minor* attacks the cancers, the bilious ulcers and the inveterate pains caused by black bile because it purges the phlegm and the bile, which are traditionally involved in the oncological process [21]. The anti-cancerous use of *epithymum* was an old remedy, mentioned by Roderic a Fonseca, in one of his *Medical Consultations* of 1619 entitled for a non-ulcerated cancer starting in the left breast (Fonseca 1619, *Pro cancro incipiente non ulcerato in mamma sinistra. Consultation quadragesima tertia*, 151-55) [24].

Balthazar Timaeus von Guldenklee also permits the moderate consumption of Rhenish wine, but proscribes those that are sweet and heavy. Finally, he pleads for a natural and moderate way of life, maintaining a daily free bowel movement. An appropriate evacuation of the melancholic humors, before each menses, requires the administration of 'Quercetanus' pills to which will be added some seeds of resin of jalap or of extract of black hellebore prepared according to the rule. Quercetanus was the Latin name of Joseph Duchesne whose scornful portrait was drawn by Guy Patin. The latter wrote in a letter to Charles Spon of January 18th 1650 : It is true that this same year (1649) there died

here a mean knave of a quack who killed a lot of people in his life, and after his death, with the miserable writings that he left under his name, that were written for him by other physicians and chemists here and there : that is Joseph Quercetanus, who made himself known in Paris as the sieur de La Violette. He was a great quack, a great drunkard and abysmally ignorant, who knew nothing in Latin and who, having been first a surgeon's assistant in the Armagnac country, which is a poor area, damned and sad, was considered in Paris and especially at the Court as a great physician because he had learned something of chemistry in Germany [25].

John Ball and British Enlightened prescriptions

In a chapter on "Palliative Medicine", Kaartinen 2013, 24-27 mentions several British practitioners whose prescriptions, in case of cancer, show similarities with the preventive recommendations of the authors considered above. Some of these principles deserve an additional attention.

As Kaartinen announces, the latter "were universally familiar by virtue of necessity": "one's health depended on everyday decisions which balanced the body by enjoying in moderation food and liquids, fresh air and warmth, exercise and rest". "A lump in the breast was a discovery requiring immediate action" and "regulating one's diet was necessary". The medical literature in English included, from Renaissance, such palliative and dietetic advices. They may be found in the *Compendious Chyrurgerie* by the German Johann Jakob Wecker (1585), in the *Directory for Midwives* by Nicholas Culpeper (1651, 1676; etc. The prescriptions are not really detailed, for example, by Richard Temple (1759-1826) in his *Practice of Physic: Wherein is Attempted a Concise Exposition of the Characters, Causes, Symptoms of Diseases, and Method of cure* (1792). Temple devotes a chapter to cancer, "this dreadful disease" for which "no certain internal remedy is yet known" [26]. "The patient must pay the strictest attention to his mode of living, and carefully avoid every irregularity. A light diet must be used; abstinence from wine, spirits, and whatever will irritate the constitution; must be strictly enjoined". He recommends the famous hemlock treatment popularized by Anton von Störck [7,14]. But he also suggests, "when the cancer has broken", "to quiet the pain and lessen the irritability of the sore", to apply

'carrot poultices', a practice inspired by a famous "carrot anti-cancerous remedy" due to Johann Caspar Sulzer and adopted in France by the military physicians Ami-Félix Bridault and Jean-Joseph Denis [27, 28].

One of the most important and more serious-British authors about the disease probably was John Pearson, who explicit the context of application of "an abstemious course of diet", because "without the strictest adherence to temperance, no remedies whatever will prove efficacious" [29, 7, 27]. This "surgeon of the Lock Hospital and Asylum; and of the Publick Dispensary", also "Lecturer on the principles and practice of surgery in London", tells in his *Practical Observations on Cancerous Complaints* how he had to examine "Mrs. B. aged twenty-six years" [29]. The patient was complaining, for two years, "of wandering mains about the loins and pelvis" and "had a sensation, as if the rectum were obstructed by a tumour". Pearson relates: "I therefore examined the state of the uterus, which I found hard, immovable, and so much enlarged that it filled up the superior part of the vagina". It appeared "that her complaints were derived from a diseased state of the uterus". "I proposed the following plan for her relief, to which she cheerfully submitted". "She was desired to abstain entirely from animal food; to take weak broth for dinner, and to drink plentifully of tea, at any part of the day. If much easiness or pain were felt in the stomach, she was permitted to allay it with a morsel of bread". After "her health was amended", "I now prohibited the use of bread and broth: and confined her to tea without milk, to barley water, and toast and water". The uterus was finally "restored in its natural situation" and "Mrs B. continued perfectly well during two years" – before a relapse... Thus, in any case, the struggle against cancer implies "an abstemious course of diet": "without the strictest adherence to temperance, no remedies whatever will prove efficacious" [29].

But the most extensive dietetic program concerning cancer seems to have been proposed, in England, by John Ball, author of *The Female Physician*, published in London in 1770. The chapter 8 is entitled "Of a cancer" [30]. "Though this disorder is common to both sexes, yet as it generally attacks women, and more especially their breasts (sometimes the womb, etc.)". It can be defined as "the worst state of a scirrhus", which "is a hard, unequal tumour, void of pain, arising from some glutinous matter". A "scirrhus may re-

main a long time in several parts of the body without injury, unless the adjacent vessels be much compressed by it". But "an imprudent management" can make it soon degenerate "into a horrid cancer". "When therefore we are under apprehension of an approaching cancer, our business is not only to attempt the corrections of the acrimony and sharpness of the blood and humours, by the use of both internal as well as external remedies, but a strict regimen with regard to diet, must also be most religiously observed" [31].

First, "the aliment ought to be such as may afford soft good nourishment, as new-laid eggs, chickens, pullets, rabbits, mutton, veal, lamb; kid, etc.". They may be "boiled sometimes with barley, oatmeal, rice, millet, spinage, endive, succory, lettuce, sorrel, turneps and the like". Boiled, they "are much better than roasted". Other foods may be added "at different times" - supposedly to satisfy the patient's appetite - like "goats or cow milk, chocolate, crayfish broth, viper broth, small welfleet oysters, hartshorn jelly, millet, rice or light bread puddings, etc.". As it is expected, the patient must carefully avoid "all manner of salt and high seasoned meats, pork, ducks, geese, and the like viscous food". The type of bread itself must be chosen: it "ought to be of good wheat well baked". It is almost useless to say that the liquors are forbidden. The "common drink" is described in a very detailed way. It "may either be soft river water that has been boiled, a well-boiled soft small ale, or small white wine, or raisin wine mixed or diluted with water, Bristol water, either alone, or with a little milk, barley water, common emulsions, an infusion of maiden-hair, or the following decoctions of sarsaparilla, quick grass, etc."

At the time when Ball was writing, the business of Bristol water was not in such a good shape, for The Bristol Waterworks Company was overwhelmed by debts and bankrupted in 1782 [32]. The maidenhair, in Latin *adiantum capillus-veneris*, was recommended by Galen for reducing the "humours amassed in some place, like the apostumes" [20]. It was used in herbal decoctions with tea, coffee, etc. known as "Bavarian infusions". One of the receipts for such an infusion starts by taking "sarsaparilla root, sliced, one ounce", boiled "in two quarts of water to one quart". "Then strain off the decoctions for use". Chomel has a French article for "Capillaires ou Cheveux de Venus" saying that some varieties of the plant are "rare in Paris" so that "the ignorant herbalists substitute the flowers of hart's tongue fern and

polypody" [22]. The European varieties, like the "capillaire de Montpellier", are used "in herbal brew or syrup, in infusion or decoction": "a small handful is slightly boiled in two pints of water, to which is added a piece of licorice". But the maidenhair from Canada "that is not rare in Paris" - may also be used because it has "a more pleasant taste" and it is infused "like tea", with "a little bit of sugar".

After having mentioned many drugs, healing herbs and "empirical medicines" used to fight the growing of scirrhous into cancer, Ball writes in a typical Hippocratic way [33,14], "If notwithstanding all our care on occult cancer becomes ulcerated, we must then endeavour to palliate or mitigate the symptoms in such a manner as may take the poor patient's life as comfortable as her situation then will admit of; for an ulcerated cancer is scarce or not at all curable" [30]. The cure "should always been accompanied, if possible, with gentle exercise in a temperate, clear and moderately warm air", but also by "carefully avoiding all manner of anxiety, grief, anger, or any other irregular passions of the mind, by gradually substituting others more agreeable in their place, such as mirth, gaiety and cheerfulness" [31].

In the eleventh edition of his *Domestic Medicine* first published in 1769, William Buchan (1729-1805) also mentions *excessive fear, grief, anger, religious melancholy* [34,35], or any of the depressing passions as some causes of cancer [34,14]. Laborious, sedentary and studious persons must be particularly conscious of the fact that cheerfulness and mirth quicken the circulation, and promote all the secretions, whereas sadness and profound thought never fail to retard them [34]. So great is the power of the mind over the body, that, by its influence, the whole vital motions may be accelerated or retarded, to almost any degree. Such secretions eject the bad humours. Hence it would appear, that even a degree of thoughtlessness is necessary to health. The translator and commentator of Buchan's *Medicine*, Jean-Denis Duplanil, even wrote that cheerfulness is the mother of health [35].

With those last considerations, we go back to the Hippocratic and Galenic prescriptions recorded at the beginning of this prospect article. The psychological prevention or palliative recommendations of the 16th to 18th centuries should be extended to historical views of previous medicine, sometimes mixed with mythical and theological

ideas, or to their adaptation to industrial society. Concerning the general history of literature devoted to breast cancer, Rouëssé's book on its developments in Occident until now provides the richest methodically ordered sum of information. He writes: "Relating to cancer, the diet plans, located at the border of quackery, parallel medicines and medicine – which is meant to be proved by empiricism or justified by scientific reason – have always proliferated. Although strongly recommended by their prescriptors, they are generally considered as complementary to other therapies, and rarely as eradicators".

To Rouëssé's overviews, older and more recent researches should be added. Some consider oncology from the most ancient times, like D. De Moulin (1983) [36], L. Weiss (2000) [37], St. I. Hajdu (2004-2011) [38,39] and D. J. Th. Wagener (2009) [40]. More limited works, chronologically or spatially, but interesting by the topics, are due to Fr. Veillet (2013/2014-2017). Monographic articles show a deep and theoretical treatment of the subject, like D. Foucault (2012) or L.D. Mora (2013) [41,42]. As a reminder, let us mention Kaartinen 2013 and Skuse 2015, as well as our 2015-2018.

Through our short and punctual research, we have crossed many prescriptive convergences. Some are common, as the exclusion of salted and spiced meats, geese and ducks, heavy wines, while chicken and the young meats are recommended. Da Monte considers borage as a good herb, with lettuce and endive, and Siméon Seth gave it for diseases of the liver, one of the organs that can be attacked by cancer. But the same vegetable may be treated differently. Da Monte proscribes parsnips as harmful for cancer, when another writer about the disease, Lorenz Heister (1683-1758), will mention it among the "protective devices against cancer (*praesidia adversus cancrum*) with "soft vegetables, that is to say barley, oat, millet (*millio*), manna, soft gruels (*pulticulis mollibus*), spinach, asparagus, salsify (*scorzoneria*), goatsbeard (*tragopogo*), chicory, parsnip, turnip, and hops – freshly cooked. The same physician shared with Guldenklee, Pearson and Ball a preference to barley, notably in brew and beer.

A last common prescription may be reserved for fumitory. Guldenklee recommended it as usual beverage. But we have seen that the power of the plant as curing and

unblocking the obstructions sometimes cancerous could be traced back to Galen and Aëtius of Amida through Fuchs. A medieval link is provided by Guglielmo di Saliceto (1210-1277; Rouëssé 2011, 129) [14,43-52], who, in his *Chirurgia*, suggests a "soft cure" of treating cancer "with the foul pills of Mésué (the supposed name of two Arab physicians, father and son) or with Avicenna's fumaria" (Saliceto 1898, chap. 58, "Du cancer ou herpès esthiomène aux membres, etc., 168 sq).

Conclusion

We agree that the prophylactic and dietetic prescriptions considered here are not only general and not absolutely specific concerning what the period called cancer, but that their virtues are, so to speak, cancelled out by their diversity. The anxious consumer who was advised to prefer or to avoid such different types of foods and drink could conceive doubts as to their efficacy. It is useless to say that, in the case of a disease which has remained incurable until now, this chronicle and corpus of speculative recommendations may appear merely to be extremely vain and disappointing.

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